

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Acts 10:34-43

Psalm 118:1-2,14-24

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Mark 16:1-8

April 4, 2021  
Easter Sunday

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This morning, I want to tell you a story about courage. Simply defined...courage is the ability to do something that frightens you, to have strength in the face of pain or grief. A couple of weeks ago I learned a whole lot about courage from a little sparrow that showed up at our house. One morning, I walked onto the deck and noticed the sparrow sitting quietly at our feeder. Most birds will fly away as soon as you open the door, but this little bird didn't move.

He let me get close enough to put my hand out, right in front of him, and I was able to touch his body ever so gently. To my surprise, he jumped onto my finger. It took one second to realize this little sparrow couldn't see. His eyes were crusted over.

He tried to fly but without sight he just fluttered to the ground. So, I picked him back up and this time, he stayed. I carefully put him in a box so that he would be safe while I figured out how to care for him and then I drove to the store to buy a birdcage.

For two weeks we washed his eyes with warm water to clear up the infection. Each day we feed him and talked to him and reassured him. And we waited until his eyes were better and he could be released back into the world.

It was bittersweet letting him go. I didn't know if he would survive or if his infection would return. And to my surprise, the next morning I looked out to see our little bird sitting on the deck. He was unmistakable because he had ruffled feathers and tender skin that was still healing around his eyes. For the next two days, he came back to the feeder as if to say hello. Each time I saw him, I would walk out and he would sit still...watching, his sight restored.

His courage had given him life. Can you imagine the strength it took for that little bird to trust a stranger and to have faith that he would be cared for and made well?

That little sparrow has taught me so much about God these past few weeks...about what it means to have strength to admit you can't go it alone, to trust that you will be cared for, and to have courage to allow yourself to be held. It is a lovely Easter message that I think we all need right now.

It's a message about our Easter faith...the faith that reminds us that Jesus has made sure that we never have to carry our burdens alone, that we never have to accept brokenness or fear or defeat. Like the sparrow, we can be healed and renewed if we are simply willing to take that step and have the courage to say, Jesus, I need you.

Paul reminds us in his letter to the church in Corinth that he couldn't go it alone either. He says that his own healing had nothing to do with his own effort. *"It was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."* Paul had spent years persecuting the church, a broken and sinful man. God saw that he was broken and needed healing and reached down to save him, picked him up and opened his eyes.

As the story is told in Acts, Paul was on his way to Damascus and a light from heaven flashed around him. Paul fell to the ground and heard the voice of Jesus say, "'Saul, why do you persecute me? Get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do.'" But, Paul couldn't see. For three days he was blind, his eyes crusted over. Then God sent a man named Ananias to lay his hands on Saul. Scales fell from his eyes and he could see. In that moment, Paul could only do one thing...he was baptized and he committed his life to Christ.

Paul knew without a doubt that God's saving grace came as an unconditional gift through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His eyes were opened. That's the power of God's saving grace...working in and through each of us to heal our pain and brokenness and sin. It's why we celebrate each and every Easter Sunday...we bring ourselves back over and over again to this incredible gift of unfailing love and redemption. And we say, Jesus, I need you. And, thankfully, our eyes are opened.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, states: *"To have Faith in Christ means, of course, trying to do all that He says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you."*

He has begun to save you already. Jesus wants to open your eyes.

I want you to consider this Easter that gleam of Heaven in your life, the gleam of Heaven that you long for. The faith in Christ that changes you. The hand of God that picks you up and saves you. This Easter, start by noticing what is broken in your own life, what needs healing, what needs forgiveness. Where do you need to have courage to let God hold you and heal what is hurting? Where do you need to see?

What if we could all be like the sparrow...when we are blind to God's grace, when we are blind to following Christ, when we are blind to our own sinfulness, we simply say Yes to being held, yes to being healed, yes to being strong and brave with Jesus by our side.

I want to close this morning with the lyrics of the beautiful old Gospel hymn...My Eyes are on the Sparrow...

Why should I feel discouraged,  
Why should the shadows come,

Why should my heart be lonely,  
And long for heaven and home,  
When Jesus is my portion,  
My constant Friend is He;  
His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I know He watches over me.  
I sing because I'm happy  
I sing because I'm free  
For His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I know He watches over me.

He watches over us...each and every one of us. He brings sight to our blind eyes. He lifts us up out of our sin. He redeems us to beautiful salvation. His eyes are on the sparrow and I know he watches of me. Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!